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PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS ON MOTIVATION FOR ART AND ITS THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS AMONG INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM

SHILPA K S
TISSY MARIAM THOMAS

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**Parental Perceptions on Motivation for Art and its Therapeutic
Effects among Individuals with Autism**

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Shilpa K S, Tissy Mariam Thomas

Department of Psychology, Christ University,
Bengaluru, India

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The Journal would publish peer-reviewed original research papers, case reports, systematic reviews and meta-analysis. Editorial, Guest Editorial, Viewpoint and letter to the editor are solicited by the editorial board. Large numbers of research papers were received from all over the globe for publication and we thank each one of the authors personally for soliciting the journal. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the reviewers and members of the editorial board who so carefully perused the papers and carried out justified evaluation. Based on their evaluation, we could accept some research papers for this issue across the disciplines. We are certain that these papers will provide qualitative information and thoughtful ideas to our accomplished readers. We thank all the readers profusely who conveyed their appreciation on the quality and content of the journal and expressed their best wishes for future issues. We convey our deep gratitude to the Editorial Board, Advisory Board and all office bearers who have made possible the publication of this journal in the planned time frame.

We humbly invite all the authors and their professional colleagues to submit their research papers for consideration for publication in our upcoming issues as per the “Scope and Guidelines to Authors” given at the website. Any comments and observations for the improvement of the journal are most welcome.

Prof. Suresh Makvana, PhD¹
Editor in Chief,
HOD & Professor, Dept. of Psychology,
Sardar Patel University,
Vallabh Vidyanagar,
Gujarat, India

¹ ksmnortol@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

When it comes to individuals with autism, parents and teachers are usually concerned about needs such as communication skills, social interaction, and toilet training and so on. However, less viable goals such as improving the creativity and the imagination skills of the child are ignored unless the child exhibit early talent. Understanding what motivates children with autism to engage in art and the benefits it offers can help in rehabilitating them by formulating helpful training programs for therapists, special educators and parents. This study aimed to answer two questions- “What is the role of motivation for art related activities among individuals with autism?” and “What are the therapeutic benefits of engaging in art for individuals with autism?” A qualitative research method was adopted to gather data and the objectives were achieved by interviewing eight parents of children with mild to moderate autism falling in the age range of 6 to 16 years. Thematic Network Analysis was used to analyze the data. This study revealed the perceptions of parents about what art means to their children. The major themes that emerged from the study include the reasons due to which children with autism engage in art, ways in which engaging in art impacts lives of the children and different attributes of the children’s art work. The current study reveals that understanding the role of motivation for art among individuals with autism can help in improving the theoretical understanding of the abilities and requirements of this group.

Early art intervention is an important period in treating individuals with autism as the “younger” they are, more “plastic” their brains are. This means that including art as part of the therapeutic plan can have an impact on their development as it offers several therapeutic benefits for children with autism.

Keywords: Autism, Art, Motivation, Therapeutic Benefits

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Art can permeate the very deepest part of us, where no words exist.” -Miller (2008)

The prevalence of autism has increased exponentially in the last decade with estimates presently as high as 1 in 88 children (CDC, 2012). A study that was conducted in South Korea reveals a prevalence rate of 1 in 38 children having autism. Autism was initially described as a disorder in which children lacked motivation for social interaction (Kanner, 1943). Since then, the definition of autism has undergone many changes and it is currently defined as a severe disorder that involves impairment in communication and social interaction- like acknowledging the feelings of other people both nonverbal and verbal communication. Some individuals with autism are believed to have limited interests, unique sleeping and eating behaviours or even a predisposition to hurt themselves by biting their fingers or banging their heads (APA, 2000).

Data that offers an estimate on the prevalence in India is unavailable. Whether there are disparities in the prevalence rate worldwide is unknown. Though, autism as a disorder is not uncommon, a large percentage of people with the disorder have not been diagnosed and do not attain the services that are crucial for them. This is the state in many countries, but it is true in case of India where there is lack of awareness and misconceptions regarding autism among professionals. One of the major issues that parents of children with autism face in India is getting the correct diagnosis (“Autism in India,” n.d.).

1.1. Autism as a Disorder

Autism is a condition that can be described as part of a spectrum. At one end, there are people who cannot function in the society due to their impairments, while at the other end, there are people who can lead successful and independent lives. The disorder is characterized by impairments in social interaction, communication and stereotyped and repetitive patterns of behaviour. The onset of the disorder is before the age of 3 and sometimes it is not recognized until the individual is much older (Sadock, 2007).

1.2. Motivation among Individuals with Autism

Individuals with autism are repeatedly associated with decreased motivation to participate in academic activities. As a result, educational programs largely rely on the employment of overt reinforcements and programmed instruction contingencies to kick start the academic performance of individuals with autism (Koegel, Koegel, & Carter, 1999). However, sustained maintenance of performance gains has always been challenging. This might be because not much attention is given to the motivational facets of training. Research that has examined the influences of motivation and reward has revealed that the way in which the reinforcers are organized has an effect on the motivation levels of the individual (Cameron, Banko, & Pierce,

2001). So, in the same way the reinforcement procedures used for children with autism might be organized in such a way that unintentionally reduces their long term motivation to involve themselves in target activities.

It has also been recommended that motivation might also be influenced by the context in which children are trained (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Contexts in which individuals with autism are forced to perform are speculated to reduce an individual's motivation in comparison to the contexts that correspond to the feelings of autonomy of the individual might increase motivation (Clark & Rutter, 1979).

Previously, it was believed that children with autism have recurring experiences of failure that leads to low motivation and low self-efficacy (Clark & Rutter, 1979). Since children with autism are known to be less eager to involve themselves in activities when compared to typically developing peers, external motivators can be used to endorse engagement and ensure the participation of children in activities (Koegel & Egel, 1979).

There are several studies that focus on the motivation for academic achievement in children with autism. However, there is hardly any research on the role of creative expression of these children. Though, some studies have been conducted on the savant abilities that children with autism possess, there is little research on the role of and the reasons why children with autism engage in recreational activities like art, music, theatre and so on. The main reason why there is a lack of research conducted in this area is due to the notion that the children with autism lack creativity (Koo, 2008). So, it becomes crucial to study why individuals with autism engage in recreational activities like art.

1.3. Art for Individuals with Autism

Few researchers have inspected the drawings made by children with autism and the contents of the drawings produced appeared less different than those of typically developing children. Apart from this, children with autism made visually realistic drawings (Craig & Baron-Cohen, 1999). As a result, these researchers assumed that the children were just copying objects without really understanding what they meant. So, psychologists Cohen and Craig (1999) believed that the children with autism lack creativity in comparison to typically developing children. According to this view, creativity was judged based on how unique or novel the response to a particular problem is.

However, in contrast Kellman (2001), professor of art education discovered that the children with autism have similar abilities for creativity as the typically developing children. Instead of looking at the end result of the drawings produced by children with autism, Kellman tried to look at the intentions and motivations behind the art produced by the children. She discovered that art is a kind of narrative, a form of self-expression for communicating their stories to others and also

enhance their cognitive development. So, through drawings they can interpret, describe, invent and even negotiate their social transactions to understand their life experiences and situations (Kellman, 2004).

Hurwitz & Day reported that there has been widespread research on the artistic skill development of typically developing children in the area of art education (as cited in Koo, 2008). In contrast, there is limited amount of research in the area of art and autism (Hermelin, 2001). So, it is essential that more research is conducted in this area to address the learning needs of children with autism.

Kellman (2004) discovered that children with autism tend to reflect in their drawings certain parts of their situations and they draw with lesser or greater motor control than their typically developing peers. Hence these children produce images that are more or less refined than their contemporaries. So, Kellman concludes that children with autism, using their cognitive and perceptual processes tend to make drawings that have significant meaning in their lives. Since such an activity is highly self-motivated, art education can certainly enhance the creativity of children with autism (Kellman, 2004).

As mentioned above, there are differences in the way researchers have conceptualized creativity of children with autism, so revisiting this area is crucial. Creativity in children with autism should be examined to discover their requirements for well-being. It is also important to explore the reasons and factors of motivation that drive these children to express themselves through art. Art for children with autism is transformative as it allows them to appear proficient, personable and engaged. Blandy, an art educator explains this experience as “art that transforms lives” (as cited in Derby, 2011). The theory of mind of children with autism hypothesizes that these children lack creativity and imagination (Craig & Baron-Cohen, 1999).

However, the link between creativity and theory of mind through imagination has dearth of research for children with autism. Frith (1972), a psychologist concluded in her study that children with autism made less varied design patterns in comparison to typically developing children. A similar conclusion was derived by Bouchet and Lewis (1991) when they assessed the drawings of children with autism. This was again interpreted as the loss of creativity. Though the studies reported shed light on research conducted in the area of autism, these studies put forward the question about how to define creativity itself.

The psychoanalytic theories of art motivation have the tendency to ignore the cognitive aspect of artistic activity (McNiff, 1977). Now, recent studies of motivation have revealed that the basic drives of id, ego and superego do not really stimulate all the categories of behaviour, rather it is important to look at the conscious motives and environmental factors that drive people to draw.

Art is generally pursued usually in response to the support given by other people. Environmental conditions are also expected to directly influence motivation in that a reassuring and aesthetically suggestive context can greatly kindle an artist's work. Contrarily, absence of recognition, negative feedback, lack of environmental stimulators and self-doubt can adversely affect motivation. So, reinforcement, whether positive or negative can play an important role in artistic development (McNiff, 1977).

It is not enough if people have talent. It is important to nurture the talent and give it the desired direction. When it comes to children with autism, there are instances where misguided teachers have stamped out children's interest in art. For instance, if a child draws the same figure repeatedly, an easy way to is to ask him or her to draw something new related to the same figure. Most children lying on the autism spectrum outshine at one thing, while struggling at something else. The skills are mostly uneven. Regardless of what kind of mind these children have, their abilities have to be nurtured. Parents, doctors, teachers and everyone working with individuals with autism have to help them enhance their abilities (McNiff, 1977).

Golomb (1992) identified drawing to aid expressive folder of children, one that is interlinked with verbal expression to produce a personal narrative. Children with autism mainly lack verbal expression ability. In such cases, children can compensate for their verbal expressivity lack by developing visual expressive ability. Children with autism have to build upon their strengths and interests in a balanced educational system (Grandlin, 1995). So, increasing the opportunity to hone their creativity in art is important for emotional and mental growth. So, while educating children with autism, a balanced approach should be adopted that not only trains them for socially desirable behaviour but also enhances creative expression.

In the current study, individuals with mild to moderate level of autism falling into the age group of 6 to 16 years was selected as it would be helpful to see how art is represented and what changes can be observed in the role of motivation among these individuals to indulge in art from middle childhood through early adolescence. According to Charles worth, Wood, & Viggiani, (2007), middle childhood is the time during which development takes place within the emotional, social, cultural, physical and cognitive dimensions. This is the time during which interests develop. Some children might be gifted in areas like art, music and maths. In case such abilities are present, they are recognized by the age of 10.

On the other hand, adolescence is an important period for social and cognitive growth and can influence the conceptions of thoughts about others, future lives and ideas about self-concept. It is most often a time during which individuals are exposed to choices that have an important impact upon the trajectory of their lives. Levinson (1978) looks at adolescence as a time that is focused on exploring and changing relations. As Erikson points out, identification and intimacy of goal commitment occurs during this stage. Also, interventions and programs are more effective when

individuals are in their adolescent period. The transition from middle childhood to early adolescence can be a significant one (as cited in Marcia, 1980). As a result, it would be interesting to see how this transition can affect the motivation and the benefits that these children experience by engaging in art.

As individuals with autism have communication deficits, the current study would depend on the interpretation of the parents these individuals to explore the role of motivation and the therapeutic benefits that these individuals with autism experience by engaging in art.

1.4. Theoretical Framework for Art Motivation

It is very clear that a single theory cannot account for all the aspects that art motivation entails because several motivations for a single behaviour are difficult to convert into empirical formulations. So, researchers have focused on a particular motive and then draw out behaviours that support their theory. So, in this manner a conceptual category is established first and then data relating it is collected to support the concept. Art is a distinct human behaviour due to its capacity to involve several other motives ranging from “instinctual” to “sublime” (McNiff, 1977).

Though there are several motives that drive artistic activity, primary motivational principles unifying all arts also exist. While exploring the basic units of artistic activity, it is fitting to discover human need for creative expression. This drive is directly related to the organism's total homeostatic patterns and one can assume that biological functioning will influence its specific behaviours. When the organism experiences a tension to eat or drink, it will act in a manner that will equalize or reduce this tension. In preparing itself to reduce tension, the organism depicts a tendency for balance and order which is crucial within the biological sphere if life is to be sustained. So, artistic activity at its most basic level is a response to the tension that artist wishes to clarify or neutralize through the creative reaction (McNiff, 1977).

However, there is more to art than just tension reduction. It also involves development of the self and surrounding environment. This inclination has been described by Goldstein, Rogers and Maslow as the organism's need for self-actualization. Rogers feels that "the substratum of all motivation is the organismic tendency toward fulfillment" and that all of the specific motives can be described with respect to the person's general actualizing tendency (McNiff, 1977).

Art is usually pursued as a reaction to the needs described above if previous efforts have been successful and supported by others. The artist thus expects a positive result and works with self-assurance. Environmental surroundings also influence art motivation. The encouraging and aesthetically rich physical environment can significantly arouse an artist's work. On the contrary, negative feedback, the lack of recognition, self-doubt and the absence of environmental

stimulation can affect artistic motivation adversely. It looks like reinforcement, or the lack of it, plays a crucial role in an artist's development (McNiff, 1977).

1.5. Rationale for the Study

The current study has been inspired owing to the dearth of literature on the role of motivation in children with autism with regard to art and art making. Currently, as there is a widespread increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism. A study conducted by CDC (2014) reported that 1 out of every 88 children is diagnosed with autism. Parents and teachers are worried about the children's capacities for performing and learning. They also want to offer experiences that are appropriate and meaningful for children with autism.

Though, educators and parents are now better aware of the educational needs of the children, they are still not exposed to the benefits of art related activities for these children. So, it is hypothesized that determining the motivation and reinforcers that enhance the motivation of children with autism will improve the pedagogical and theoretical understanding of the needs and abilities of this group.

Most of the studies conducted in the area of autism focus on the deficits and the issues surrounding this population rather than looking at the positives that can be extracted from individuals with autism. It is important to tap the strengths of these children and nurture them so that they achieve a sense of interest and satisfaction in whatever they are doing. To explore this area, the research driving force behind engaging in art has to be studied.

Understanding what motivates children with autism to engage in art can help in rehabilitating them by formulating helpful training programs for therapists, special educators and parents.

Art, rather than being looked upon as a leisure activity that can be used to keep the child with autism occupied, can be used as a crucial way of building the inner world of the individual. Drawing has already been included as part of many types of interventions to assess fine motor skills, imagination deficits and so on. So, it can be a practical therapy for individuals with autism.

When it comes to individuals with autism, parents and teachers are usually concerned about needs such as communication skills, social interaction, and toilet training and so on. However, less viable goals such as improving the creativity and the imagination skills of the child are ignored unless the child exhibit early talent (Martin, 2009).

Individuals with autism are frequently associated with decreased motivation to take part in academic activities. (Koegel & Carter, 1999). However, they desire art making (Martin, 2009). So what is it about art that attracts these children is something worth studying.

According to Marcuse (2007), art is a ‘creative process that liberates humankind.’ So, when art is seen as a path for tension reduction among humans, this concept can be applied to individuals with autism as well.

Though there is quite some conducted in the area of art and autism, there is hardly any research conducted in the area of motivation for individuals with autism engaging in art and related activities. Understanding what motivates these children with autism to engage in art can help in creating effective training programs for parents, teachers and special educators. Such programs can help them understand these individuals better and educate them in ways that can aid in developing their individual potential and attributes.

1.6. Operational Definitions

For the purpose of the current research, the terms are defined as follows:

1.6.1 Motivation. The force, the stimuli or the need that precipitates artistic action. Motivation can be in the form of extrinsic rewards or praise. It can be offered by people and even the kind of environment in which the children are exposed to (McNiff, 1977).

1.6.2 Autism. According to the American Psychological Association (n.d.), autism is a neuro-developmental disorder that is characterized by impaired verbal and non-verbal communication, social interaction and repetitive behaviour. For the purpose of this study, any individual with mild to moderate autism falling into the age group of 6 to 16 years will be considered.

1.6.3 Art. According to Pearse, defining art can be obscure and difficult. The definitions of this term are culturally bound and like any other social construct, it has changed in ways that at its basic level it reproduces or reflects social values. Art can be defined differently based on the culture as a system of communication, reflection or production (as cited in McNiff, 1977). Art making and art are meaningful approaches to mediate the complexities of communication, identity formation and social interaction. So, in this study, any individual with autism who engages himself or herself in drawing, painting or art making (crafts) will be considered.

1.7. Statement of the Problem

The current study aims to explore the parental perceptions on the role of motivation and the therapeutic benefits of art among individuals with autism.

1.8. Specific Research Questions

- What is the role of motivation for art related activities among individuals with autism?
- What are the therapeutic benefits experienced by individuals with autism through art related activities?

The current study will attempt to answer these questions by employing a social constructivist paradigm as the main focus is to elicit subjective meanings of the experiences of the participants, the focus being exploring the role of motivation and the therapeutic benefits experienced by individuals with autism through art related activities.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the current study was to explore the role of motivation for art related activities and the therapeutic benefits experienced through art among individuals with autism. In order to understand these concepts, the perceptions of the parents were considered. Since the current study aimed at eliciting parental perceptions of art motivation and the benefits experienced by children with autism, a qualitative research design was used. This chapter includes the research design, the paradigm followed, the characteristics of the sample, procedure and the method for data analysis.

2.1. Research Design

In order to achieve an understanding about perceptions of the parents on the role of motivation and the therapeutic benefits experienced by individuals with autism through art, a qualitative research design was used as it helped in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences and accounted for individual differences better than quantitative design. It was an appropriate methodology for this study as perspectives of the parents of the children with autism was procured. Merriam (1998) highlights that; the basis of all qualitative research is an understanding that an individual's reality is constructed by that individual's interaction with his or her social world. Using qualitative methodology, the researcher tried to understand the meaning that parents have given to the art related activities that the child engages in.

2.2. Research Paradigm

The present study was conducted by employing a social constructivist paradigm as the main focus was to elicit subjective meanings of the experiences of the participants' from the parents, the focus being exploring role of motivation for art and the therapeutic benefits experienced through art related activities among individuals with autism.

Social constructivism, which originated with Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes the role of children's social relationships with more experienced individuals, who act as guides to children in their construction of their views of the world. Social constructivism outlines how the experienced individual is able to elicit more advanced behaviours from the learner through active facilitation.

2.3. Specific Objectives

- To explore the role of motivation for engaging in art among individuals with autism
- To examine the therapeutic benefits of engaging in art among individuals with autism

2.4. Characteristics of the Sample

2.4.1. Sample size. The total number of participants for the study consisted of 8 members. The sample included mothers of individuals with mild to moderate autism in the age group of 6 to 16 years.

2.4.2. Sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique was used to obtain the sample of parents of children with autism. Purposive sampling involves selecting individuals who have knowledge, experience and understanding particularly to the topic of the research wherein the general population would not be able to be a part of. This sampling technique was used for two main reasons: 1) The nature of the current study dictated a very strict inclusion criteria. 2) Due to the small sample size, finding exactly suitable and appropriate candidates increased the statistical power of this study.

2.4.3. Characteristics of the sample. The sample consisted of 8 mothers of individuals with mild to moderate level of autism, falling in the age group of 6 to 16 years. The children had to be interested in art and should have engaged in drawing, painting or art making for at least two years. Participants whose children had co morbid conditions along with autism were not considered for the study.

2.5. Data Collection Method

For the purpose of the current study, the data was collected through an in-depth interview process where a semi-structured interview was conducted on the participants on all 8 participants. Manen believed that interviews provided a means of gathering and exploring experiential and narrative data for the purpose of better understanding human phenomenon (as cited in Creswell, 2007).

A semi-structured interview provided an opportunity to probe further based on the participant's responses in a manner, which self-report questionnaires would have not. It is type of qualitative research technique that provides the researcher a guideline as to what research questions to ask the parents, thereby having a structure to the interview process.

Furthermore, it helps in establishing rapport building and provides the participant's flexibility to answer to the questions being asked (Smith, 2007). The researcher, in turn had the flexibility to take in cues provided by the participants and ask relevant questions to better understand what the participant is experiencing. The schedule consisted of questions pertaining to what motivates the child to engage in art and how art related activities have benefited the child. After the schedule had been constructed, it was sent to three professors of Psychology and two special educators who deal with children with autism, for validation.

2.5.1. Research process. Data collection involved the presence of the researcher at each of the participants' houses or the organizations for autism for the purpose of conducting the interview with the participants. However, before commencing the interview itself, informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to the scheduling of interviews. At this stage, the participants were also informed that the interviews would be audio recorded. They were also made aware of the fact that there was no set limit for the duration of the interview; however, the interview

would usually take about forty-five minutes to enable the researcher to gain maximum insight on the participant's perception on the role of motivation and benefits experienced by individuals with autism through art.

Once consent had been obtained from all 8 participants, the interviews were scheduled with each of the participants at their respective houses or the organizations that referred the parents. The interview was conducted according to the semi-structured interview schedule that had been previously prepared. The process was spread over two sessions, wherein, one session consisted of the interview and the second session was conducted during the process of data analysis, for clarification purposes.

2.5.2. Data analysis. The method of analysis that was used for the proposed study was thematic network analysis, which is a method in which data is identified, analyzed and patterns or themes are determined with regard to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are various steps in conducting a thorough thematic analysis. Firstly, the researcher familiarized herself with the data she had collected. During this stage, the researcher transcribed the verbal data. Secondly, the researcher generated initial codes, by organizing the data into meaningful groups. Thirdly, once the data was transcribed and coded accurately, the researcher then sorted the various codes into certain basic themes. Fourthly, once the basic themes were formed, they were reviewed once again in order to produce more refined themes. These themes served as a basis for constructing a thematic map. Fifthly, each theme was clearly named and defined to provide a sound basis for the detailed analysis to be written. Finally, a detailed report consisting of a concise, coherent, logical and interesting account of the story that the data tried to communicate was compiled.

2.5.3. Ethical considerations. There were various ethical considerations concerning this research study. Firstly, informed consent was taken from each of the ten participants before including them in the study. Secondly, the principal of voluntary participation was honoured. Thirdly, the participants were assured of confidentiality with regard to their responses and results. They were also informed that the information that they provide as well as their results will be used purely for academic purposes only. Fourthly, the participants were informed that they have the choice to withdraw from the study at any point of time.

2.6. Reliability and Validity of Data

Unlike a quantitative research study, qualitative research uses different methods of establishing reliability and validity of both the interview schedule as well as the analysis of data. The method of member-checking or respondent validation was used in order to check the accuracy and validity of the data. During the data analysis phase, each respondent was once again contacted by telephone in order to check the precision in which the data had been analyzed.

CHAPTER 3:

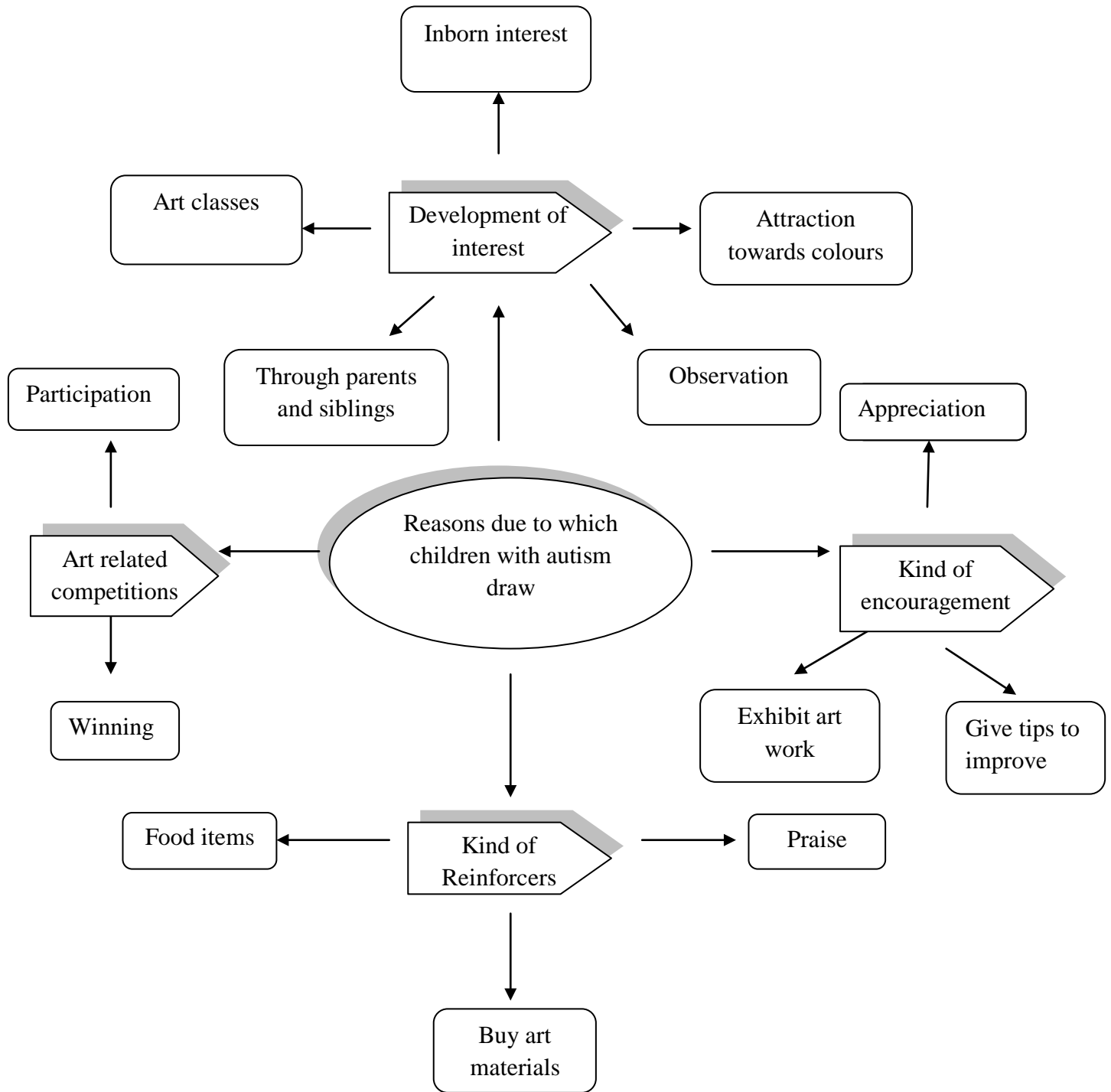
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to present significant findings from the eight interviews conducted regarding the parental perceptions of art motivation among individuals with autism. The objective was to answer the questions “What is the role of motivation for art related activities among individuals with autism?” and “What are the therapeutic benefits of engaging in art for individuals with autism? The total number of participants for the study consisted of 8 mothers of children with mild to moderate autism in the age group of 6 to 16 years. Data was collected through an in-depth interview process where a semi-structured interview was conducted on the participants on all 8 participants. The method of analysis that was used for the proposed study was thematic network analysis.

While examining the data, it was found that aspects like interest to engage in art, kind of encouragement, types of reinforcers used and art related competitions determined the motivation of art among individuals with autism according to the mothers of these children. Most mothers reported that they primarily use praise and appreciation to encourage their children and sustain their interest in art.

It is interesting to note that most of the mothers felt that their child did not understand the concept of achievement and it did not matter if he or she won prizes, but the children wanted to be appreciated for their art work. All the participants agreed that engaging in art makes the children happy and acts as a stress buster, hence relaxing them.

Figure 1. Showing the thematic network of the basic themes, the organizing themes and the global theme for the reasons due to which children with autism engage in art.



Objective 3.1. To Explore the Role of Motivation in Art Related Activities among Individuals with Autism

Majority of the participants agreed that motivation plays a crucial role in determining the role that art plays the lives of children with autism. So, this is in line with the objective of exploring the role of motivation in art related activities. While interviewing the mothers, the main factors that can impact the motivation of these children engaging in art include the development of interest in art, kind of encouragement given, the types of reinforcers used and participation in art related competitions.

3.1.1. Reasons due to which the child engages in art. One of the main objectives of the study is to explore the role of motivation in art related activities among individuals with autism, it is important to understand the intentions behind the art work made by the children. A research conducted by Kellman (2005) suggested that it is important to explore the reasons and factors of motivation that drive these children to express themselves through art.

The perceptions of the mother on what motivates the child to engage in art also sheds light on the ways in which these factors can be tapped to enhance art motivation. Owing to the debate nature versus nurture, there are many psychologists who believe that though abilities are innate, they are enhanced by environmental factors (McNiff, 1977). However, without debating on the presence of innate ability to draw or make art, it is important to address motives that are directly linked to the conscious functioning.

During the analysis of data, it was found that the participants conceived factors underlying art motivation along certain dimensions, the most prominent ones being, the development of interest in the child to engage in art, the kind of encouragement the child receives for art, kinds of reinforcers used and child's participation in art related competitions.

3.1.2 Development of interest in art. All the eight participants had stated that their child engages in art with a lot of interest. Most participants agreed that drawing comes to their child naturally and started drawing from a very young age, much before they started schooling.

All the participants agreed that their children were fascinated and curious about colours since a young age. So, according to the participants, this attracted them to engaging in art related activities. Most participants felt that their child developed interest as art classes were included in the school curriculum.

Few of the participants also reported that their children might have developed interest in art because the parents used drawings to communicate with the child when he or she was very young and could not draw. Some the parents reported that their child's talent in art might be

genetic as there are other family members who are gifted in art. They felt that talent for art runs in the family.

Another participant said that her child observes his sister drawing and later draws what his sister drew initially. So, this reveals that the mother feels that her child is influenced by the drawings made by his sister.

3.1.3 Kind of encouragement child receives to engage in art. All the participants agreed that encouragement for the child's art work is very important and they make sure that they motivate their children in different ways to engage in art. Educational programs largely rely on the employment of overt reinforcements and programmed instruction contingencies to kick start the academic performance of individuals with autism (Koegel, Koegel, & Carter, 1999).

According to the majority of the participants, children receive encouragement from their school, family and friends. Participants also agreed that they use different techniques to encourage their children, the main ones being appreciation, giving tips to the child to improve the art work, collecting and exhibiting the art work at home.

All of the participants agreed that the child receives encouragement for the art work at school by the teachers. Majority of them felt that encouragement at school is very important because it comes from the professionals and it helps the children to treat the right path when it comes to their art work.

All the participants agreed that their children received encouragement for their art work in the form of appreciation. The mothers reported that as soon as the child finished a particular art work, they ensured that they encouraged the child by acknowledging by praising it.

Majority of the participants stated that they hang their child's art work at home or they collect the art work. This act of the parents communicates to the child that the parents are interested in their art work and want to show it off to others who visit their house. So, the mothers feel that doing this motivates their child to engage in art further and helps sustain the interest of the child. The participants also agreed that both the teachers and family members give the child tips to improvise on the art work made. This seems to instill in the child a feeling that the significant people in his or her life is interested in what he or she is doing. According to the mothers, giving suggestions to the children can help in motivating them to engage in the activity further.

3.1.4 Kinds of rein forcners used for engaging in art. Majority of the mothers agreed that they use rein forcners to engage their children in art. They also agreed that by using rein forcners, they could get the children to work faster and keep them motivated to engage in art. Research that has examined the influences of motivation and reward has revealed that the way in which the rein

forcers are organized has an effect on the motivation levels of the individual (Cameron, Banko, & Pierce, 2001).

Most of the mothers agreed that the immediate reinforcement for the art work made by the child was praise and the other reinforcers like food and art materials could be given to the child later. Majority of the mothers agreed that the child did expect to be praised as soon as a particular art work is finished. It has also been recommended that motivation might also be influenced by the context in which children are trained (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Majority of the participants agreed that they purchase art materials to motivate the child. They make sure they buy the child whatever he or she wants, be it paints, sketches or crayons. They also agreed that the child asks for what kind of art materials he or she wants and the parents ensure that they purchase it to motivate the child.

The participants agreed that the first thing that they do to motivate their children to engage in art is praise and appreciation. All the participants reported that they make it a point to praise their child's art work and acknowledge the effort that their child has taken to create it. Majority of the mothers stated that their child expected words like "Wow", "Very Nice" from the parents and others at home once he or she finished a particular art work. On the contrary, few participants reported that their child did not expect to be praised, but felt very happy when they did. If they forget to praise or acknowledge the art work, the mothers said that there was no change in reaction by the child.

All the participants agreed that they show the art work made by their children to their friends and relatives. They felt that this would encourage their child to engage in art work as praise and appreciation from significant people would bolster the child's interest to be involved in art.

Majority of the mothers agreed that they use food to reinforce for their child to be engaged in art. Most of the participants agreed that their children loved certain food items like chocolates, candies, ice-creams and sweets. So when these food items are used as reinforcers, the participants reported that their children seemed more motivated and wanted to finish their drawings faster. Since children with autism are known to be less eager to involve themselves in activities when compared to typically developing peers, external motivators can be used to endorse engagement and ensure the participation of children in activities (Koegel & Egel, 1979).

3.1.5 Participation in art-related competitions. When it comes to participation in art related competitions, majority of the participants agreed that their child participates in art-related competitions. However, there was mixed response about winning. Few mothers said that the child had never won any art related competitions, while few others reported that their child did

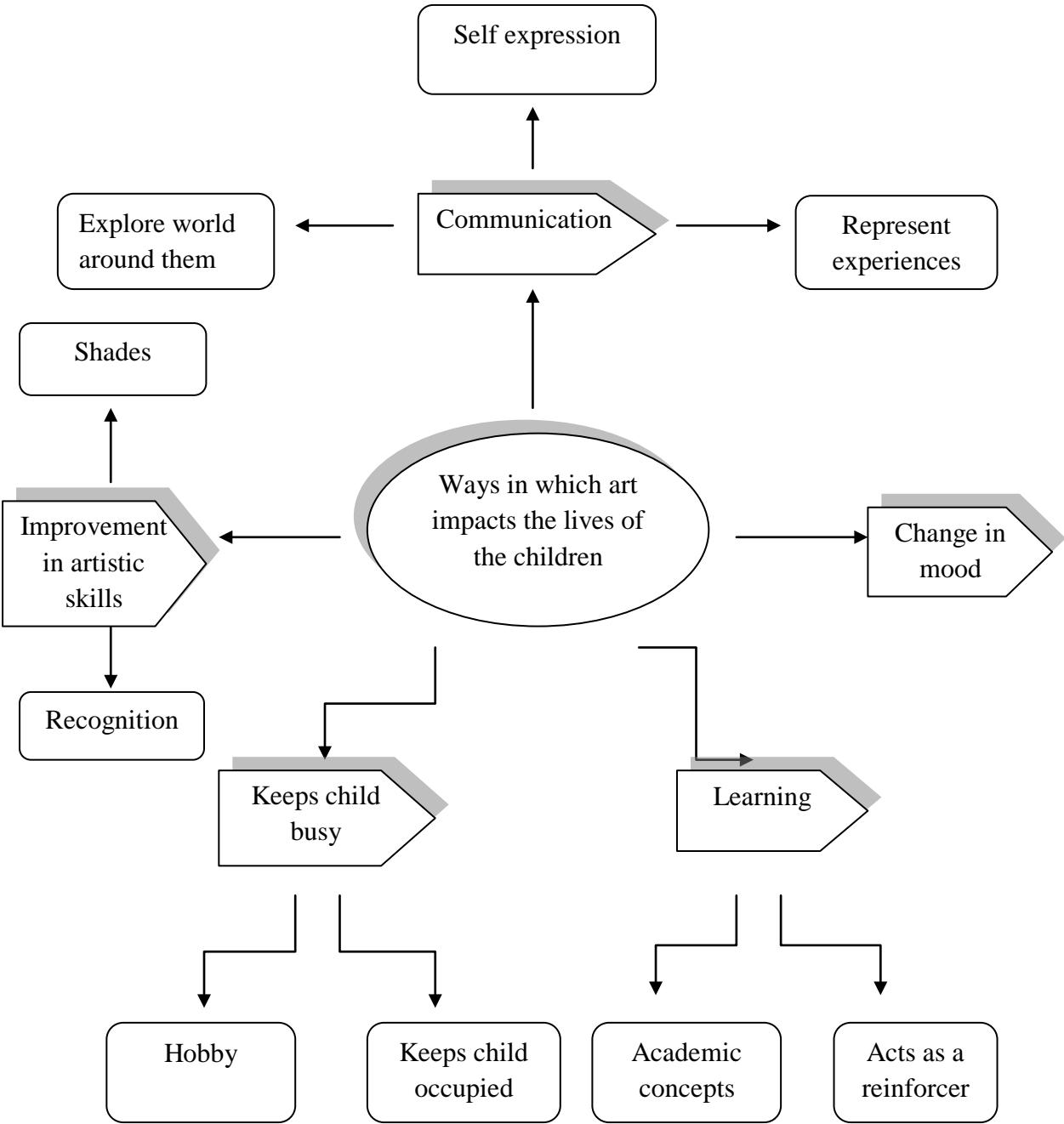
win prizes for his or her art work. But, majority of the participants agreed that the child did not understand the concept of pride and achievement.

Participants felt that taking part in art related competitions would help the child engage in the art work because he or she would see many such children who are into similar art work as theirs. This could motivate the child to create art work and improve on it by looking at other children who share the same interest.

When it comes to winning the art related competitions, few mothers reported that the child had won few prizes, while others reported that their child did not win any art related competitions. Both these sets of participants felt that the competitions held importance to the children mainly because of the gifts and they did not understand the purpose behind it.

When it comes to sense of pride and achievement, most mothers agreed that their child has not developed a sense of pride and achievement. They felt that their child does not get the concept of why the prize is given or not given to them. The participants reported that all that matters to the children is appreciation from significant people, even if they do not win the prize.

Figure 2. Showing the thematic network of the basic themes, the organizing themes and the global theme for the ways in which art impacts the lives of children with autism



Objective 3.2. To Examine the Therapeutic Benefits of Engaging in Art among Individuals with Autism

3.2.1. Ways in which engaging in art impacts the child's life .Majority of the participants agreed that engaging in art work had a positive impact on the child. They reported that engaging in art had a lot of benefits that enhanced the well-being of the child. This finding is in line with the second objective of my study, which aims to explore the therapeutic benefits that children with autism experience by engaging in art. According to the mothers, the main benefits that the children experienced due to art include communicating with others through art, change in the mood of the child, keeping the child busy, helps child focus on learning and improvement in the kind of art made by the child.

3.2.2 Communicating with others through art. All the participants agreed that their child communicates with them through his or her art work. They feel that the child expresses through his or her art work, explores the world around them by engaging in art and communicates his or her experiences through art. This shows that art acts as a form of self expression, hence helping the children to communicate their experiences to the world around them. Instead of looking at the end result of the drawings produced by children with autism, Kellman (2005) tried to look at the intentions and motivations behind the art produced by the children. She discovered that art is a kind of narrative, a form of self-expression for communicating their stories to others and also enhance their cognitive development.

Majority of the participants agreed that their child communicates with them through art about his or her experiences. They felt that the child drew or painted what he or she saw or what impacted him or her. Some of the mothers reported that the child also draws what he or she likes and few others said that their children drew or painted what attracted them the most. This reveals that the children use art as a form of medium to express what has had an impact on them. So, through drawings they can interpret, describe, invent and even negotiate their social transactions to understand their life experiences and situations (Kellman, 2005).

Many mothers felt that their child explores the world around him or her through art. They felt that their child draws what he thinks or views the world around him or her. Few mothers felt that the child puts forth his or her views on paper through painting and drawing.

This reveals that children with autism have their own views about the world and express it through their art work. They have their own perspective about nature, what constitutes an ideal human being and so on. This is contrary to the common belief that children with autism have impairment in communication. Their verbal communication might be impaired, but they can express through other mediums like art.

This reveals that children with autism draw what catches their eyes and they try communicating this with others through their art work. Art can also be used to express what one likes and dislikes.

Art changes the child's mood. All the participants agreed that art has an effect on the mood of the child. Most mothers felt that there was a change in the mood of the child during and after engaging in art work. They felt that the child became more relaxed, less restless and was very happy while engaging in art. So, art acts as a stress buster for the child.

All the mothers agreed that the child engages in art as a means to enjoy. They felt that engaging in art is enjoyable for the children since they can draw and paint whatever they feel like without being restricted to any particular criteria. So, according to the mothers, the child is very happy while doing the art work. Most mothers reported that they could see the joy on the child's face when he or she was drawing or painting.

This reveals that the mood of the child changes once he or she is occupied in art related activities. This shows that art as an activity makes a significant difference in the child's life. Most mothers agreed that art there is a change in the child's mood from being restless to normal once the child starts drawing and even after he or she has finished a particular art work. So, art acts as a stress buster and relaxes the child. It is a medium that is liberating for these children. So, artistic activity at its most basic level is a response to the tension that artist wishes to clarify or neutralize through the creative reaction (McNiff, 1977).

Art keeps the child busy. When it comes to individuals with autism, they have restricted interests. So, it is difficult for to be occupied with a particular activity for a long time. However, studies have been conducted which reveal that many children with autism engage in art with a lot of interest. Art for children with autism is transformative as it allows them to appear proficient, personable and engaged (Kellman, 2005).

All the participants agreed that art keeps their child busy and occupied. They reported that the main reason why most parents encourage their child to do art is because it keeps him or her busy and occupied. In addition, the children also enjoy engaging in art. Most parents stated that they use art as a means of keeping the child occupied when they go out for social gatherings, when he or she starts getting restless. Most parents stated that this is one of the most important benefits of their child engaging in art.

This reveals that art can be beneficial for children in keeping them occupied even when they are forced to be in situations that they are not comfortable with. They can then engage in drawing or painting to distract themselves.

Art helps the child to focus on learning. Most mothers reported that art helps their child to learn academic concepts. They agreed that the child is more interested to engage in learning when he or she is taught using colour codes, pictures and by making him or her draw. Mothers also reported that they use art as a reinforcer to make the child study. This reveals that art can play a significant role in keeping the child engaged in academics apart from being just a leisure activity.

Majority of the participants agreed that the child is taught spellings, numbers and common objects with the help of pictures and colours. They felt that using colours, drawings and pictures as part of teaching the children helps in keeping the child interested in learning the academic concepts and also makes them sit for a longer time.

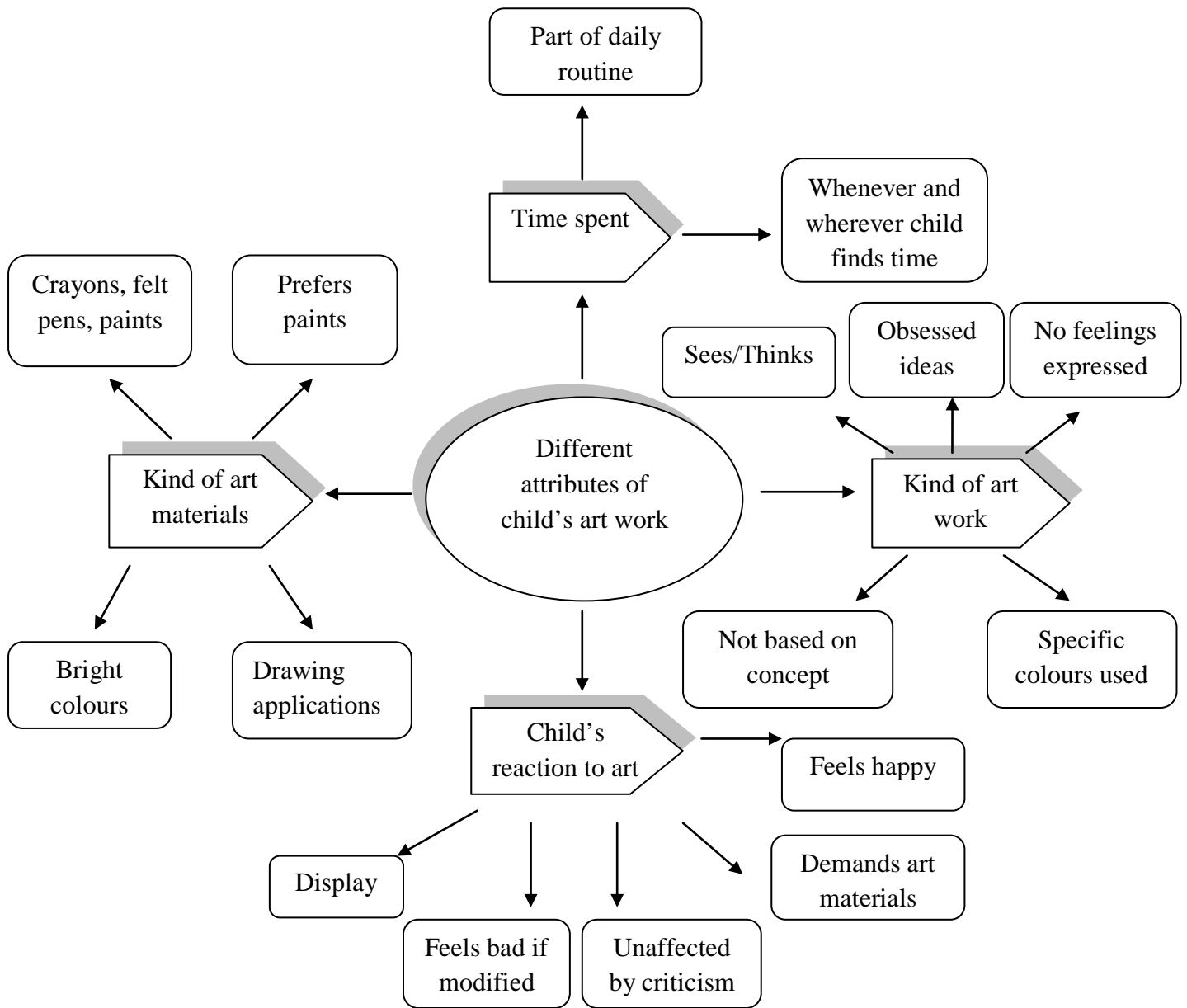
This reveals that children grasp the concepts better when art related articles are used to teach them. As a result, art is used by the parents and therapists to train the children. The mothers also said that they engage their child in academics and other activities by using art as a reinforcer. They space art and other activities such that the child is motivated to engage in the other activity by telling that he or she will be allowed to do art work once he or she finishes the particular activity. The mothers felt that the urge to engage in art motivated the child to complete the other activity, which otherwise would be difficult.

Improvement in the child's art work. Majority of the mothers agreed that they have observed changes in the child's art work with age. Most of the participants agreed that they could see improvement in the child's art work with regard to the colours and shades used. They also felt that it was easy to recognize the child's art work now when compared to before. This reveals that with practice and age, children tend to develop skills with respect to art.

Many participants reported that when the child initially started off drawing and painting, he or she mainly used a particular colour for everything that he or she drew, whether the colour was apt for the picture or not. However, the mothers agreed that with age the way the children chose the colours and shades for their drawings improved with age. Majority of the participants agreed that when their child initially started drawing, it was difficult to comprehend what the child had drawn. But, with time it became easier to understand what the child was trying to draw.

This reveals that the way the child uses the art materials also changes with age. Mothers observed that initially the child would apply a lot of pressure while drawing and painting, tearing the paper. According to the mothers, with time there is a lot of improvement in the way the children use the art materials as well.

Figure 3. Showing the thematic network of the basic themes, the organizing themes and the global theme for the different attributes of children's art work



3.2.3. Different attributes of the child's art work. Another theme that emerged from the interviews conducted on the participants is the features of the child's art work. The main components of the child's art work include the time spent by the child on the art work, kind of art work made by the child, kind of art materials used by the child, child's reaction to reinforcement and the child's reaction to one's art work. Majority of the mothers had similar opinions when it came to the features of the child's art work.

Time spent by the child on art work. Majority of the participants agreed that their child draws on a regular basis whenever and wherever he or she finds time for around ten to thirty minutes each time he or she sits. Most participants felt that since the children were so interested in art, they did it regularly whenever they found time.

This reveals that art is an activity that is part of the child's routine and plays a significant role in the life of the child. The mothers need not ask the child to engage in art and he or she does it whenever and wherever he or she feels like. This shows that the interest to engage in art comes to the child naturally and need not be forced by others.

Kind of art materials used by the child. Majority of mothers reported that their child preferred certain art materials over others. Most of the participants agreed that the child uses most mediums of colouring like felt pens, crayons, colour pencils and paints. However, all the mothers agreed that the child preferred paints over crayons, felt pens and colour pencils because paints offered sensory stimulation. Most mothers felt that since children could touch and feel the paints, they preferred paints over other modes of colouring.

This reveals that the child likes to touch and get a feel of the paints before making any art work. The children tend to use hands rather than brush to paint since it gives them a feel of the colours and using hands is more flexible when compared to the brush.

Few parents mentioned that their child used painting applications on ipad apart from drawing and painting on paper. The participants reported that the child had explored the different types of painting applications on the ipad. They also stated that the child exactly know how to modify the font, colours and even the size of their drawings. Many of these children prefer using ipad for drawing because they do not tear like how paper does and different options can be explored in one application, which is more attractive than paper for certain children.

All the participants agreed that the children use bright and stimulating colours for all their drawings or paintings. They felt that they used colours like dark blue, black and so on because these are visually very stimulating and children with autism are attracted to visuals. Many parents reported that the child used the same bright colour for all the drawings and paintings whether it was appropriate for the drawing or not.

This reveals that the children use bright colours for their drawings because they want them to look visually very attractive and stimulating. This urges them to further involve them in art because it allows them the freedom to choose their own colours and make whatever they feel like.

Most parents agreed that the child wanted a new set of colours even if one of the colours was missing from the set. The participants reported that the children wanted all the colours intact and loved drawing and painting mainly because of their attraction towards colours.

Kind of art work made by the child. Majority of the participants agreed on the kind of art work that the children engage in. Most of the mothers agreed upon certain common aspects of the children's art work. Most of the mothers agreed that the children what they have experienced or seen rather than copying what others ask them to. They agreed that the art work made by the children is free flowing when they do it on their own rather than when they are asked to draw or paint. This reveals that the children prefer freedom in engaging in art work so that they can make what they want to rather than being told what has to be done, which curbs their creativity. Kellman (2001), discovered that the children with autism have similar abilities for creativity as the typically developing children.

This reveals that the mothers have to monitor the children when they want to make them draw anything in particular. However, when the concept of the art work is forced on the children, they seem very disinterested and have to be constantly told to complete the drawing. However, when they are given the freedom to draw what they like, the art work is better, free flowing and more meaningful for the children.

Majority of the participants mentioned that whatever the child draws depends on what he or she is obsessed with at that particular period. The participants reported that the child drew the obsessed object repeatedly wherever and whenever he or she found time. The mothers also mentioned that the obsessed figure is not randomly included in the drawing; rather it is aptly placed in the drawing or painting.

Majority of the participants agreed that the children incorporate the suggestions given by the parents and teachers into their art work. However, some parents felt that it is better when teachers give the feedback because the child might not take the suggestions of the parents seriously. The mothers reported that the child would rework on the art work to suit the suggestions given by the teachers or parents and shows it again to them. This reveals that the children take the suggestions given by significant people in their lives seriously and work towards making their art work better.

Many parents reported that the child speaks about what he or she is drawing or painting. So, this helps the parents understand what the children have drawn, without which they might find it absurd and difficult to comprehend.

Draws what he or she sees and experiences. Majority of the participants agreed that the art work made by the child includes what he or she has seen and experienced rather than abstract concepts. Kellman discovered that children with autism tend to reflect in their drawings certain parts of their situations. She concludes that children with autism, using their cognitive and perceptual processes tend to make drawings that have significant meaning in their lives.

The mothers reported that the child cannot imagine and draw, so he or she draws what attracts or impacts him or her. The art work made by the child also includes objects or colours they are obsessed with.

This reveals that the children draw what they see and think about. It mainly includes concrete situations of everyday life rather than anything intangible. Majority of the participants reported that the children do not represent their feelings or thoughts in their art work. They cannot represent abstract aspects of their lives, their emotions and their feelings through art.

A well-documented case in this area is that of Nadia, who created drawings that were remarkable (Selfe, 1977). With reference to her disability, Gardener (1982) argued that the drawings produced by Nadia did not convey meaning to any of her feelings or ideas. The current study confirms the previous literature as the mothers stated that their children do not represent their emotions and feelings through their art work.

This reveals that art is a form of self-expression for children with autism. However, it is confined to what they see, experience and think rather than what they feel and what emotions they experience during a particular situation.

Child's reaction to the art work. Children with autism are very particular about how they want their art work. Majority of the participants reported similar expectations that their children had once they finished a particular art work. Most of the children were very particular about how their art work had to be displayed at home, the way they wanted their art work to look and does not like it when people modify the art work.

Some participants also mentioned that the child leaves his or her art work once finished and is not bothered about it after that. Participants also mentioned that their child demands for new art materials often and once he or she gets it, starts engaging in art immediately. Majority of the participants stated that the children are unaffected when people find their drawings odd and absurd. They continue to engage in art work despite people finding it unusual and strange.

Another aspect that most participants agreed is that the children do not like it when their art work is modified. They want the art work to be how they conceptualized it and do not like it when the art work does not pan out like how they planned it initially. For instance, many mothers mentioned that the child cries when his or her paper tears due to excess of water while painting. They also do not appreciate it when others modify their drawings by adding different colours or by improvising on the drawings.

This reveals that the children are very particular about how they want their art work to look. Any deviations from their expectations will agitate them and make them frustrated. So, freedom to make their art work they want would be satisfying for these children.

Many participants reported that the children do not understand the importance of their art work. They said that the children just left the art work once they are finished with it. They did not treasure it and keep their art work safely. The participants felt that it was just an activity that kept them relaxed and made them happy. And once they were done with it, they did not acknowledge the importance of their art work. As a result, when parents hang the child's art work at home, though they acknowledge and feel happy about the art work being theirs, they do not understand the significance of it. The children do not understand that the art work is displayed because it is so good or because their parents acknowledge it. One of the participants said, "We all praise him and we stick his photos on the wall also whatever he makes. But, he is not bothered about it once he finishes it." – (P2, personal interview, November 23, 2014)

Even when people do not acknowledge or praise the art work of the children, they seem unaffected by it and continue to engage in their art work. Many participants mentioned that there have been instances where people do not understand the child's condition and art work that he makes. Such people might find the art work odd and absurd. However, the participants reported that this makes no difference to the children as they continue to draw and paint as they used to regularly.

Studies have discovered that children with autism have decreased interests and motivation. However, they do desire art making (Martin, 2009). As discussed above, art making is not just an activity to while away time, rather it offers therapeutic benefits for the child. Golomb (1992) identified drawing to be one of the ways through which children with autism can express, one that is interlinked with verbal expression to produce a personal narrative. Children with autism mainly lack verbal expression ability. In such cases, children can compensate for their verbal expressivity lack by developing visual expressive ability.

CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to answer two questions- “What is the role of motivation for art related activities among individuals with autism?” and “What are the therapeutic benefits of engaging in art for individuals with autism?” The total number of participants for the study consisted of 8 mothers of children with mild to moderate autism in the age group of 6 to 16 years. Data was collected through an in-depth interview process where a semi-structured interview was conducted on the participants on all 8 participants. The method of analysis that was used for the proposed study was thematic network analysis.

In the course of the interviews conducted, it was found that that there were few factors that impact the motivation for engaging in art related activities among individuals with autism. Most of the interviewees felt that the child’s interest in art related activities was mainly innate and was nurtured due to the kind of encouragement they receive, the kind of reinforcements that are used and due to their participation in art related competitions.

The participants felt that engaging in art had a positive impact on different aspects of the child’s life. Majority of the participants agreed that art served as a means of communication, a form of self-expression for the child as he or she enjoyed the freedom to create art according to their discretion. Art acts as a stress buster for the child and also aids in focusing and learning academic concepts.

There are certain commonalities in the way children make their art work. Art is a part of the children’s daily routine and there are similarities in the kind of art materials and the art work made by the children with autism. Most children with autism share characteristic ways of reacting to their art work.

Drawing is already used for assessments of imagination deficits, fine motor skills and many other skills. As a result, art could be easily used as an early intervention for individuals with autism as it benefits them in several ways. Art serves to be an appealing arena for individuals with autism as it bridges the gap between their strengths as visual learners and weaknesses such as their imagination deficits.

4.1. Major Findings of the Study

With regard to role of motivation in art, and the therapeutic benefits of engaging in art, three themes emerged- Reasons due to which children engage in art, benefits experienced by the child by engaging in art. Thus, the basic, organizing and global themes of Reasons behind the child engaging in art, ways in which engaging in art impacts the lives of the children and the different attributes of the child’s art work. The major findings of the study include:

- Children with autism engage in art mainly because of the inborn interest, attraction towards colours and practice on a regular basis.
- Art included as part of school curriculum and other members in the family who are talented in art can instill the child's interest in art.
- The kind of encouragement given, in the form of appreciation from significant people in the child's life, buying art materials for the child and exhibiting the art work can motivate the child to engage in art.
- The kind of reinforcers used by the parents can further motivate children with autism to engage in art.
- Participation in art related competitions and winning prizes can induce interest in the child to engage in art.
- Children with autism experience many benefits through art. Art acts as a means of communication and self-expression.
- Engaging in art not only keeps the child occupied, it can also be a reinforcer to help the child learn other academic concepts.
- Apart from being a stress-buster, engaging in art also helps the child improve his or her artistic skills.
- Children with autism draw or paint what they see and experience rather than their feelings and emotions.
- The art work made by the children is concrete and does not involve abstract meaning.
- Children with autism use bright and visually stimulating colours for their art work.
- Children are very happy when their art work is acknowledged and appreciated.

4.2. Implications

Early art intervention is an important period in treating individuals with autism as the “younger” they are, more “plastic” their brains are. This means that including art as part of the therapeutic plan can have an impact on their development as it offers several therapeutic benefits for children with autism.

Understanding the role of motivation for art among individuals with autism can help in improving the theoretical understanding of the abilities and requirements of this group. Determining what motivates these children to engage in art can aid in rehabilitating the children by devising effectual training programs for teachers, special educators and parents.

Art, rather than being considered as an individual's way to spend time and be occupied, it can be used as a device that can be used to construct the inner world of the child. Knowing what factors impact art motivation can help in formulating therapeutic plan for children with autism.

The current study does not look at art as an intervention only for talented children. Rather, art can be used as part of therapy for any child with autism who is interested in it. The goal should

not be to mend the child's art work; rather the focus should be on mending the aspects of child's life that can be done through keeping them engaged in art. This study throws light on the fact that skills like imagination and creativity need to be rehabilitated along with the other crucial skills that have to be reformed among individuals with autism. Offering the children with suitable environmental stimulation might help in developing creative thinking among individuals with autism.

4.3. Scope for Further Research

This study has several domains for future research for art and individuals with autism. Future studies can focus on including more number of participants and frequent sessions to obtain richer and better quality data. Interviewing the special educators and other significant people in the lives of the children can help in procuring valuable information regarding the child. It is crucial to look at the kind of teaching strategies that can be used for art among individuals with autism. The drawings made by these children could be analysed closely to understand these individuals better. Gender differences in the art work made by the children with autism could be explored.

4.4. Limitations

This study resulted in a thematic network that was based upon eight interviews with the mothers of individuals with autism. While these interviews provided a sound exploration of the role of motivation in art and the benefits experienced by individuals with autism by engaging in art, interviewing the fathers, art teachers and therapists of these children could have yielded richer information. There was a limit on the number of participants I could enroll for the study due to time constraints. Interviewing more number of participants might have offered different perspectives. The mothers of seven out of the eight participants interviewed had sons, while only one of them had a daughter. As a result, there is imbalance with respect to gender.

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